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UNCLAS DUSHANBE 001852

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SUBJECT: UNHCR PROGRESS AND NEED FOR HELP IN TAJIKISTAN

¶1. (U) The UN High Commission for Refugees is shifting its focus from emergency operations in Tajikistan for remaining refugees, to development programs that will help to integrate the mostly Afghan refugee community into Tajik society. The shift is made possible by Tajikistan's political stability, but is threatened by a demand for bribes by the State Migration Service, a proposal to move refugees from Dushanbe and Khojand to the countryside, and the arbitrary deportations that create new emergencies.

¶2. (U) UNHCR has repatriated over 53,000 refugees from Tajikistan to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and other CIS countries. An unknown number of refugees returned home without UNHCR assistance. Some 1,400 refugees have also been resettled in Canada. Of the 1,500 refugees who remain in Tajikistan, 98 percent are Afghan, and the rest from Iran and Iraq. UNHCR is working to find durable solutions for the remaining refugees. Very few refugees, mostly the elderly, handicapped, and single mothers, are given cash stipends. The rest UNHCR is hoping will be considered for refugee status in the United States or fully reintegrated into society. For those remaining in Tajikistan, UNHCR intends to use UNDP as an implementer for assistance, taking over the micro-credit, housing, and school programs that benefit not only the refugees, but also their local communities.

UNDP is responsible for development programs, and UNHCR considers itself more of an emergency response body, however, UNHCR also plans to become more involved in border security matters as well, particularly human rights and asylum case training.

¶3. (U) The State Migration Service is often the main obstacle, demanding bribes for refugees to stay in country, and now threatening to move refugees from the major cities of Dushanbe and Khojand, where they have access to UNHCR, schools, and medical care, to the outlying countryside where they will be more vulnerable than ever.

¶4. (U) Given this picture, the Embassy requests the next circuit ride take place as soon as possible, and the Embassy will actively join with UNHCR in its demarches to the Tajik government, urging the Tajiks to allow these refugees, many of whom have been here for ten years, to be resettled permanently with either citizenship or legal resident status so that they can become fully participating members in Tajik society.

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